

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Growth Policy is to serve as a plan to guide the choices of the City of Helena and the greater community, to the year 2030, to ensure public health and safety, protect the environment, maintain a high quality of life, promote a sustainable economy, and be a strong livable community.

The 2011 City of Helena Growth Policy represents an extensive updating of the 2001 Growth Policy, with new chapters addressing transportation, water, and the environment, which incorporates natural resources. This document is intended to be used to guide land-use decisions and will serve as the guiding document for zoning and subdivision regulations. The chapters address the various requirements of Montana law (Title 76, Chapter 1 MCA) for Growth Policies.

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Helena will continue to grow in both population and geographic area (through annexation). The 2009 Montana Census and Economic Information Center estimated the city's population at 29,939, making Helena Montana's sixth most populated city. Population is expected to increase to about 39,268 residents by 2030 based upon a projected annual growth rate of approximately 1.3%.

Most Helena residents over age 25 (94.7%) have a high school diploma, and 42.8% have a college degree. On average, families living within the city have higher earnings and income than families living outside the city.

Helena's median age increased from 38.8 in 2000 to 40.3 in 2009. With 63.3% of the population between ages 20-64 and 14.5% age 65 or older, this aging trend is expected to continue. 5.4% of the population is under age five, compared to 17.8% age 5-19 years old.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS

The segment of population age 65 and older is expected to continue to increase over the next twenty years as the “baby boomers” reach retirement age. Retirees will take with them a significant amount of work experience, affecting employers across the city, state, and nation. Employers will be challenged to fill positions with less knowledgeable workers and may require some flexibility to retain their more experienced workers.

With government as the major employment sector, Helena has been fortunate to avoid some the economic difficulties faced by other places during the recent national recession. In fact, the unemployment rates for Helena and Montana have continued to be significantly lower than the national average, with Helena enjoying the lowest rate of Montana larger cities. Residential and commercial building development increased over the past ten years, increasing property values, benefiting existing property owners but limiting first-time home buyers.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Helena’s public facilities have been greatly expanded over the past decade thanks to federal funds and public-private partnerships. The City adopted five- and ten-year capital plans that identify future infrastructure needs. The Missouri River water treatment plant and the waste water treatment plant both received important upgrades. Approximately 2,500 linear feet of the 1906 storm drain system was lined. East side and west side water storage tanks were built to improve the current delivery system, allowing land to be annexed and developed. Many new subdivisions have been developed and miles of new water and sewer mains, stormwater drainage improvements, and streets have been constructed. The south interchange for I-15 was constructed, and a new north interchange is planned. Conservation of open space lands have increased by about 526 acres since 2000.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmentally, managing climate change and rising energy costs and keeping good air and water quality are all important to a healthy, sustainable community. New federal and state requirements will affect how the City works with its natural environment. Management of wildfire risk and the urban deer population continues to be a noteworthy consideration for land -use development. Environmental issues typically do not respect political boundaries and need intergovernmental coordination.

CULTURE

Helena has continued to flourish culturally with an extensive variety of history, dance, music, theater and visual arts organizations, museums, and libraries. Live performances that include local and touring talent can be seen throughout the year. Recreation includes City programs and numerous volunteer organizations that take advantage of the City's facilities. The City's own historic preservation and public art programs continue to thrive with the help of volunteer advisory boards.

LAND USE

Since 2000, the City of Helena has grown to the north and east with the annexation of approximately 1,497.749 acres or 2.34 square miles. Subdivisions annexing to the city range from 3.9 acres to 131 acres and from 3 to 104 lots, increasing the number of residential lots in the city by 974 lots by 2009.

By having a denser population, reducing travel needs, and providing infrastructure, cities have always played a role in reducing environmental impact. In addressing transportation, land use, environment, and water with the goals set forth in this policy by other Commission action, the City of Helena recognizes its role in providing environmental leadership that reduces demands on resources, e.g., water, fossil fuels, or materials, as well as its effects on the natural environment such as wildlife and sensitive areas, and downstream stormwater and wastewater discharge.

New to this revision is an increased focus on addressing infrastructure demand rather than supply. Incentives for conservation practices, efficient building design, and demand-based infrastructure can serve residents' needs, have less impact, and ultimately save money while increasing quality of life. This document charges the city with providing the infrastructure and services its residents need while looking at policies to reduce user and system demand and the scale of needed infrastructure. Examples include expansion or upgrade of a treatment plant, or construction that will insulate future residents from increased energy and travel costs.

Green infrastructure is a way to recognize the benefits of permeable surfaces and living infrastructure, such as trees that benefit the community as a whole by resulting in less water required for lawns and better cooling for buildings. In designing for current and future needs of Helena, it is important to look at programs and policies that can play an equal role by shifting demand from limited resources.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GROWTH POLICY

Reflecting the City's recent development history and the projected trends, the Growth Policy identifies goals, objectives, and implementation mechanisms such as policies, regulations, and other measures for each subject area identified in Montana law. The following implementation mechanisms apply to the entire document:

1. The City should consider Chapter objectives when approving ordinances, regulations, public improvements, plans, standards, and budgets.
2. The City should collaborate with other jurisdictions, agencies, and organizations to achieve the objectives.
3. The City should support the objectives through participation in and collaboration with boards, organizations, and citizens groups.
4. The City should develop community outreach and educational programs to achieve the objectives.

CHAPTER GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Goal:

Promote and sustain economic vitality while maintaining and enhancing the quality of human and natural environments.

Objectives:

1. Foster diversification of the economic base.
2. Promote the maintenance and expansion of existing Helena area businesses and recognize the importance of government employment to the Helena economy.
3. Promote development of resources, educational programs, and infrastructure that facilitate sound business development.
4. Promote positive partnerships between public and private sectors within the Helena area to encourage a healthy business community.
5. To the greatest extent possible work closely with Lewis and Clark County, and abutting communities, to develop joint standards and provide a consistent regulatory system for the city of Helena and the surrounding suburban areas.
6. Maintain and protect cultural resources recognizing that they are an important and irreplaceable asset for the community and tourism.

7. Direct community incentive programs and other financial resources to job development, both to retain and expand existing industries and attract new ones.
8. Support efforts to encourage the creation and expansion of small business and help reduce the rate of failure.
9. Facilitate the permitting process while maintaining the public interest.
10. Review City zoning requirements to identify and remove unnecessary impediments to commercial and industrial development, while protecting established areas with the appropriate standards and promoting the interests of the greater community.
11. Promote the concentration of specialized industries within the city where specialized infrastructure, information, and labor advantages of greater concentration could promote economic development and desirable growth.
12. Encourage development of jobs that pay salaries and benefits sufficient to support families and contribute to the economy of the community, including providing active assistance to businesses and individuals, where appropriate.
13. Encourage green building and renewable energy investments to provide jobs that will increase property values, reduce energy costs, and strengthen the community's sustainability.
14. Work closely with the Helena Regional Airport Authority to facilitate growth in aviation, aeronautical, and light manufacturing businesses related to aviation within the area encompassed by the Airport Master Plan.
15. Continue to support the Montana Business Assistance Connection's efforts to attract new businesses, and support growth in existing businesses within the greater Helena metropolitan area.
16. Facilitate the creation of a medical district in the area east of the Capitol Complex and work closely with St. Peter's Hospital, Shodair Hospital, and other medical providers to retain existing medical related businesses, and support new business development within this district.

HOUSING

Goal:

Housing that is safe, available, accessible, and affordable for all sectors of the population.

Objectives:

1. Support and expand the supply of housing for all residents, especially lower income, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, homeless, and others with special needs.
2. Encourage the preservation and rehabilitation of the existing housing stock.
3. Work with nonprofit agencies to maximize housing resources for low- and moderate-income residents

4. Promote energy efficiency in new and existing housing.
5. Support infill development of additional housing that harmonizes with the character of existing neighborhoods.
6. Maintain a regulatory environment that protects the health, safety, and welfare of citizens while minimizing barriers for new or existing housing.
7. Conserve and enhance the character, quality, and livability of the community by preserving and improving distinctive neighborhoods that offer diverse housing opportunities.
8. Encourage the development of housing located in proximity to physical, technological, social, and economic infrastructure.
9. Develop and preserve housing to minimize impacts on natural resources and the physical environment and to maximize social resources while meeting emerging needs.
10. Maximize constructive neighborhood involvement in housing development and design.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Goals:

- A. Protect public health and ensure public safety.
- B. Protect and enhance the natural environment; promote efficient use of community infrastructure, services, and transportation networks; and conserve resources.
- C. Educate citizens for emergency preparedness and the protection of life, property, and environment.
- D. Provide and maintain quality park facilities, open spaces, and recreational opportunities for citizens of all abilities and age groups.
- E. Promote conservation, workplace safety and other community values by investing in buildings, vehicles and programs encompassed in facilities and services that support green building design, workplace ergonomics and energy efficiency.

Objectives:

1. Make public health and public safety high priorities, and address potential hazards for areas located adjacent to and within the City.
2. Encourage infill development on vacant and underutilized land and full utilization of properties currently served by, or in close proximity to, infrastructure with a scale and quality that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.
3. Apply development requirements equally to public agencies and private entities.
4. Create a public-works funding system that will divide the cost of providing infrastructure and protecting the environment between the public and those developing land.

5. Implement the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan.
6. Continue to provide a safe community for citizens and visitors through education and mitigation for adequate response to, and recovery from, disasters and emergencies.
7. Maintain safety as people travel in the community.
8. Continue training programs for public safety personnel to minimize emergency response times.
9. Develop and maintain disaster, mitigation, emergency, and recovery plans.
10. Support joint planning efforts to provide coordinated infrastructure in the future.
11. Increase and support recycling for Helena residents.

TRANSPORTATION

Goal:

A multimodal transportation system that;

- A. Meets the current and future transportation needs of the greater Helena area including, but not limited to, travel by automobile;
- B. Minimizes demand for petroleum products and emissions of green-house gases by promoting transportation choices and efficient land use patterns;
- C. Promotes public health by facilitating non-motorized transportation;
- D. Meets the unique transportation needs of the area's elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged populations;
- E. Respects the area's natural and historic context and minimizes adverse impacts to the environment and existing neighborhoods;
- F. Provides for transportation choices in the community to allow safe and efficient travel;
- G. Minimizes vehicle miles traveled;
- H. Promotes a development pattern that is more compact and less dispersed; and
- I. Connects to regional transit.

Objectives:

1. Plan a logical, long-range arterial system, including interstate access, that promotes a compact, highly interconnected urban land use pattern and can be systematically implemented by right-of-way reservations and advance acquisition procedures.
2. Implement policies and decisions to ensure that bicyclists and pedestrians can use and cross major roadways and highways leading to the surrounding area.
3. Include appropriate facilities that are safe, comfortable, integrated and convenient for travel by persons of all ages and abilities, automobile, foot, bicycle, and public transit in major street improvement projects and developing areas.

4. Prefer transportation improvements that preserve the natural panorama of skylines and sightlines and that are compatible with historic resources, and minimize cut-and-fill on slopes resulting from construction.

ENVIRONMENT

Goal:

Maintain and enhance a healthy, sustainable environment, respect significant natural features when development is permitted, and mitigate development's impacts with the City providing leadership in conservation and resource protection.

Objectives:

1. Maintain and buffer irreplaceable natural features such as wetlands, stream corridors, and similar high-value habitats that provide wildlife habitat and recreational, water quality, and safety values, such as flood control.
2. Preserve habitat identified as protected by the Endangered Species Act or as important to wildlife species identified by the State of Montana as species of conservation concern.
3. Minimize wildlife conflicts with new subdivisions.
4. Identify deer-resistant vegetation and drought-tolerant species and plant material that require minimal watering, incorporating a comprehensive public information program covering desirable landscape practices including green composting, xeriscaping, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and adopt strategies for city activities that reflect best current practices in landscaping and pest management.
5. Protect the natural open spaces, skylines, and sightlines on the city's south border, evaluate subdivisions for objects of historic and aesthetic significance, and protect such features or mitigate their loss.
6. Develop and implement an overall formal management strategy that includes a prioritized urban forestry program.
7. Require subdivisions to provide an efficient transportation system that accommodates future connectivity and non-motorized transportation to maintain air quality by reducing dust, auto emissions and greenhouse gases.
8. Evaluate subdivision impacts to ground and surface waters, water bodies, drainages, floodplains, riparian areas, and wetlands, incorporating adequate buffers or requiring appropriate mitigation, including, but not limited to, stormwater treatment and discharges to improve the viability of wetlands.
9. Reduce demand on the water supply system and the gallons per capita per day demand, thereby reducing the need for infrastructure expansion by adopting a targeted multi-faceted community education and outreach water conservation program that may include incentives.

10. Pursue water supply/municipal watershed protection, especially the Ten Mile watershed as a key part of the municipal water supply, and restore those parts of the watershed that have been impaired by human activity.
11. Minimize environmental degradation in areas with challenging physical and environmental characteristics, such as steep slopes, wildland-urban interface, watercourses, drainage ways and wetlands, and minimize cut-and-fills on slopes resulting from road or building construction.
12. Prevent loss of life, property, and increased costs to the public from a Wildland-Urban Interface fire on public and private land located in and around Helena and maintain an effective emergency response and recovery system that ensures safe and orderly evacuation.
13. Promote energy efficiency and conservation with development standards, land use regulations, public/private partnerships and education, and consider the use of incentives where appropriate.
14. Establish a municipal greenhouse gas reduction goal and implement the recommendations of the *2009 Climate Change Action Plan*.
15. Eliminate financial disparities by providing recycling services to city residents and other participants in accordance with their financial support.
16. Require city operations or contracts to include weed-free materials and construction methods.

WATER

Goals:

- A. Provide an adequate and stable supply of safe and economical water to the Helena community.
- B. Protect groundwater and surface water quality in the Helena area watershed for all users.
- C. Reduce the per capita demand for water.
- D. Reduce the water and wastewater treatment needs.

Objectives:

1. Maintain current sources of water and increase the city's access to new water resources to support current and projected growth and development.
2. Promote sustainable water availability for multiple uses of area waters, such as for recreational activities, forest health, wildlife preservation, and maintaining viable agricultural lands.
3. Encourage land-use change and development proposals that promote efficient use of city water infrastructure and resources.
4. Promote the efficient use and reuse of potable water.

5. Continue to invest in system upgrades and maintenance of the city's municipal water and wastewater network.
6. Coordinate the development of new, or expansion of existing, water and wastewater treatment capacity with Lewis and Clark County as necessary to meet the needs of a growing population.
7. Protect and maintain the Ten Mile watershed and water reservoirs.
8. Protect ground water and surface water quality in the Helena area watersheds.
9. Encourage in-fill and full utilization of properties currently served by, or in close proximity to, city water and wastewater infrastructure.
10. Review ways to reduce nutrient discharges from the wastewater treatment plant and the stormwater system, including enforcement of the Stormwater Ordinance and erosion control requirements.
11. Promote reducing impervious surfaces, thus increasing infiltration through the soil which helps regenerate groundwater and remove pollutants.
12. Work with the county on joint development (city/county) standards that promote future connection to city services.
13. Continue to authorize connection of county residents with failing septic systems or lagoons to city treatment facilities when compatible with this Growth Policy and the City discharge permit.
14. Establish and maintain an inventory of sensitive areas such as water bodies, riparian areas, wetlands, and watersheds.
15. Protect sensitive wildlife and aquatic habitat dependant on the area watershed and preserve critical ecological areas, such as wetlands, floodplains, and riparian corridors.
16. Minimize the effect of development in areas with watercourses, drainage ways and wetlands and require mitigation of adverse impacts.
17. Encourage the use of xeriscape landscaping, grey water, rain barrels, and other mechanisms to reduce demand on potable water and the amount of effluent.
18. Establish nutrient reduction programs to reduce wastewater treatment requirements for City treatment facilities.
19. Continue to promote water conservation techniques.
20. Monitor the increase of invasive species and promote programs that reduce their spread in waterbodies.

CULTURE

Goal:

Strengthen the relationship between Helena's cultural assets and overall economic vitality, social welfare, and quality of life of the community. Helena's diverse cultural life is broadly defined as including the visual and performing arts, history, library, education, recreation, and its people.

Objectives:

1. Improve accessibility to cultural opportunities for all the citizens of the community.
2. Continue to educate the public about the City's cultural programs and opportunities.
3. Continue to explore and increase options to support cultural tourism, enhance economic development, address social and cultural issues in the community, and encourage community pride and aesthetics.
4. Pursue opportunities for coordination and collaboration of the City's cultural resource programs with other city programs and projects, and with other community organizations.
5. Continue to support the City's cultural advisory committees such as the Historic Preservation Commission, Public Art Committee, International Affairs Council, the City-County Parks Board, and the Civic Center Board within budgetary constraints.
6. Continue to promote the preservation of historic and prehistoric sites, structures, objects, buildings and historic districts.
7. Address historic preservation issues at the local level and integrate them into planning and decision-making processes by considering how developments affect historic and prehistoric resources.
8. Support the economic and social vitality of historic districts by measures such as business improvement districts, tax increment financing districts, zoning, and neighborhood planning.
9. Expand and maintain the City's existing public art collection so that it supports its identity as "The Best Little Art Town."
10. Actively coordinate with the City's Capital Improvement Program and other building activities to ensure that works of art are installed and maintained to create and define civic and public spaces.
11. Encourage a variety of recreational opportunities for all ages, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds.
12. Manage recreational use to protect the integrity of environmentally sensitive areas.
13. Include the City's recreational facilities as part of an overall expansion and maintenance program with funding to adequately maintain sports fields, trails, and other City recreational facilities.
14. Analyze opportunities for increasing City-supported recreation programs and services.

LAND USE

Goal:

Protect and enhance the natural environment; protect cultural and historical assets; preserve and enhance community aesthetics; protect established neighborhoods and address compatibility of uses; and promote efficient use of community infrastructure, services, transportation networks, energy and resources.

Objectives:

1. Minimize danger from wildland fires, flooding, soil erosion, and other environmental hazards, and mitigate development impacts in areas with environmental constraints, including adopting measures to mitigate development's effects on floodplains, wetlands, and water bodies and improve the existing situation when possible.
2. Address overall development functionality to:
 - A. Increase energy efficiency, reduce vehicle trips, maintain air quality, and minimize noise;
 - B. Provide cohesive neighborhoods and pedestrian-friendly environments with connected transportation linkages with walkable block lengths or pedestrian corridors for physical connectivity, and a sense of community.
 - C. Provide opportunities for mixed-use development and reduce the need for automobiles, encourage walking, and save energy through infill development.
3. Implement the 2009 City-County Memorandum of Understanding.
4. Give priority for future extension of services and annexations to property located within the Urban Standards Boundary area.
5. Do not annex undeveloped land until all public facilities are adequate to serve the new development, or a development agreement is in place which assures that those facilities will be provided when needed.
6. Ensure that joint development standards for the urban standards area:
 - A. Require that new development connect to public services whenever practical, and provide for the future opportunity for connections when not; and
 - B. New development will be encouraged or required to be contiguous or near existing development in order to avoid the long-term cost to tax-payers of providing services to an inefficient development pattern.
7. Implement the mixed-use areas and urban standards boundary identified on the Future Land Use Map, update the Growth Policy as new issues arise and make the mixed use areas a priority when developing neighborhood plans.
8. Minimize functional and visual impacts of entry corridors and non-residential development on existing residential neighborhoods.

9. Foster open-space connectivity around the city to link parks, open spaces, and water bodies through pedestrian and bicycle trails and minimize development impacts on open space.
10. Promote development of dense and intense land uses both in the city and in close proximity to existing city services to better utilize city infrastructure and encourage the shared use of facilities such as lift stations and stormwater ponds to ensure efficient expenditure of public funds.

COORDINATION

Goal:

Cooperate and coordinate with East Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Jefferson County, Broadwater County, and any other adjacent local jurisdictions as needed for land use development issues to the extent possible.

Objectives:

1. Support consistency and integrity of planning efforts for facilities, services, and land uses with adjacent jurisdictions.
2. Explore options for coordinating efforts to maximize effectiveness and efficiencies in service delivery for programs, projects, buildings, lands, infrastructure, etc.
3. For any subsequent revisions, updates, and implementation of the Helena Growth Policy, cooperate and coordinate with other adjacent local jurisdiction as needed.
4. By July 1, 2011, develop a proposal for joint infrastructure planning under 76-1-604 (4)(c) MCA to be completed by July 1, 2013.

FUTURE GROWTH POLICY REVIEW, EVALUATION AND UPDATES

Goal:

Review and update the Growth Policy in a timely manner and as needed.

Objectives:

1. Amendments to the City of Helena Growth Policy will be considered as needed and, at a minimum, will be considered once every five years. These amendments will also consider their relationship to the long-term plan for the community. Therefore, the frequency of amendments will not be subject to a specific timeframe.
2. Any necessary changes to development regulations, modifications to capital improvements programs, and proposed neighborhood plans required for implementation should accompany the proposed amendments to the Growth Policy so that regulations will be consistent with the Policy.
3. As neighborhood plans are proposed for inclusion in the Growth Policy, give priority to the mixed use areas displayed on the Future Land Use map.